

City of Darien
Minutes Economic Development Committee
Wednesday, December 11, 2019

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm by Chairwoman Tina Beilke. Other committee members present were: Matt Weberling, Brian Gay, Lou Mallers, Bob Hahn, and Nick Pitzer. The meeting was held at Darien City Hall with Mayor Joe Marchese in attendance.

2. Public Comment

There were no Public comments.

3. Approval of Minutes - November 20, 2019

The minutes as submitted for November 20, 2019, were approved.

4. New Business

a. Chuck Pine of Chuck's Southern Comforts Cafe

Chuck discussed the history of bringing his restaurant to Darien by doing late-night site surveillance runs all over the area to scout locations to expand his popular Burbank, IL restaurant. Initial asking price for the Millennium Banquets site was high (\$2.3m), the condition of the parking lot was a major concern, on top of the significant renovation costs to update the building (estimated to be several hundred thousand dollars). Incentive money offered by the city for the parking lot repair was an exclusive reason for making a next-day decision and offer to purchase and create the restaurant. The work was done well and on schedule at an estimated expense of \$300,000. Current annual revenue is estimated to be \$5.0 - \$5.5m per year. Mayor commented on a positive partnership that erased blight, added a local quality dining/event option, and enhanced city revenue.

Chuck's New Concept - Breakfast (Coffee and Beignets) and Lunch (Soup, Salad, Sandwich) only. Touch-screen ordering with 2,000 square feet or less. Drive-Thru is a MUST HAVE for the 3rd restaurant, in addition to ease of access. Leasing is his most likely option (2 other restaurants are enough financial commitment). Chuck stated he is business-minded and willing to talk to other business owners as needed to discuss his positive experience with Darien business ownership. Chuck will be interviewed for the Darien video. Chuck commented on tight labor market.

5. Old Business

a. Darien Economic Development Survey

The committee found the survey results to be very useful and informative. Comments proved helpful in furthering part of the EDC mission on quality of life by understanding what people clearly want to see more of (dining, family entertainment, services) and some things that frustrate or are unclear to them in terms of personal benefit or usefulness (Chamber/Funds for CGCC/Etc).

b. EDC Communications Piece

Brief discussion on the focus of a single page double-sided communications piece: retention versus new business origination? It was agreed that retention of current businesses should likely be the primary focus. Proposed cost for piece is \$2,500. More to follow.

Mayor will draft the outreach letter and will present to EDC Chairman and Angelo.

c. Miscellaneous Items

The Mayor visited several businesses in person the evening of December 4th, when Chestnut Court hosted their "Santa on a Fire Truck" shopping event. The owners and/or store managers appreciated meeting and found it nice to receive a personal introduction, with a chance to discuss their impressions or concerns about business in Darien. The EDC has discussed how this type of outreach should be positive for many business owners, which furthers the mission.

Mr. John Manos is requesting financial assistance in the development of his new 2-unit restaurant pad (at Brookhaven Plaza). Building will be aesthetically similar to the center across the street (Chiba, Nothing Bundt Cake, etc). Development to mirror the Brookhaven Center is estimated to be \$500,000, however estimate increases to \$800,000 if finishes match Chiba center. Mr. Manos is asking for \$150,000 to split the difference of the upgrade cost of \$300,000.

City bulletin sign was discussed. Proposal is to erect a three-way LED advertising sign. Advertising sales will be the revenue generator, covering City's cost to construct. Initial dimensions of the sign discussed were 16' x 8' with a solid monument sign brick base.

Westmont fast casual restaurant (Italiomo) owner is no longer a prospect for the current Brookhaven Dunkin Donuts space. Owner requested the city to absorb development costs, which City declined.

Census 2020 - Full count is critical for funding purposes. The City will be looking at expanded access beyond home mailings - faith-based groups, schools, libraries, senior centers, etc. EDC will assist with the Census and use business outreach as an opportunity to discuss census and getting an accurate count. The Census is due to President December 2020.

There was a discussion of a future “Partnership Breakfast” modeled on ideas from Brian Gay and Aurora EDC involving corporate sponsors and building shared vision and stakeholder feelings between city and business community.

6. Next Scheduled Meeting

January 8 2019 at 7.00 p.m. in Darien City Hall.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 9:14pm approved.